

Speech of Mr. Seward.

profiting by the enthusiasm awakened throughout the world by the American Revolution, and by the embarrassment which the British Government suffered in consequence of it, succeeded in obtaining from the British Parliament some relaxation of the rigors of that penal code in regard to education and the rights of property; and in the year 1792, when the exigencies of the British Government had become more alarming, they succeeded in obtaining from the British King and Parliament a renunciation of legislative or sovereign power over the kingdom of Ireland, and it was expressed in these words:—

"The rights claimed by the people of Ireland, to be bound only by laws enacted by his Majesty and the Parliament of that kingdom, are established, and at no time hereafter shall be questioned or questionable."

Ireland exulted for a delicious moment in national independence regained. It was only for a moment, and it was a delirium: Ireland required the repeal of the penal code, and demanded a Constitution. The Parliament of Pale, constituted by the Protestant population alone, and being in the interest of England, refused both. Irish people, and clergy, persecuted by the Protestant, Esmaux, Fitzmaurice and their associates, in 1798, conspired to raise the standard of insurrection, but they were betrayed, and the rebellion crushed in the gorm. The Government of Great Britain now assumed that the people of Ireland had fully and fairly tried the experiment, and had proved themselves incapable of exercising the franchise of self-government; therefore it was assumed that the people of Ireland were and must be governed by Great Britain. The British Parliament, therefore, sent down to the Parliament of this so-called "act of Union," in the year 1800, that majority of a Legislature who rendered the perfidious and treacherous assistance. By the act of Union, Ireland in name was united to the British Government, but was, in fact, absorbed, and became a province of the British Empire, with only the shadow of the representation of the Protestant minority of the kingdom. Daniel O'Connell, a jurist and an advocate of surpassing genius, eloquence, and learning, inferring from the failure of the rebellion of 1798, that the time for martial revolution had passed

at least for the present, conceived the bold purpose of obtaining a change of the Constitution, and a restoration of his country to her place among the nations of the earth, by a scheme of civilisation, keeping always within the restraint of the law, and looking to the end that the ultimate consent of the King and Parliament of England. In the year 1829, he obtained a signal triumph in the passage of the act of "Catholic emancipation." There remained but one step more from that memorable achievement to the restoration of the independence and freedom of Ireland. That step was the repeal of "the act of union." But the ruin which Burke had predicted as the baleful fruit of the penal code had come on, and pressed too hard upon the feet of the agitators. Ireland could not wait the slow and doubtful result of civil agitation. The nation divided between the parties of "Old Ireland," following the lead of Daniel O'Connell and his peaceful standard, and "Young Ireland," under the guidance of Wm. Smith O'Brien, and advocating to the strategy of arms.

Now, sir, in point of fact, it is possible that even if the Irish people had remained united, neither of these systems could have been successful. But it is certain that when they divided and broke, both systems signally failed.—Daniel O'Connell died in broken health, a pilgrim on his way to Rome, at the city of Genoa; and O'Brien, the leader of the Irish rebellion, being found without attendants, arms, or troops, was arrested, convicted of high treason, sentenced to be executed, and his sentence being commuted by the Crown, he is now a prisoner in Van Dieman's Land. Simultaneously, starvation and pestilence stalked through the land. De-

population acquired a frightful momentum, and continuing ever since, has furnished the last proof that even the most sceptical could require that never on earth was a revolution which was attempted by Smith O'Brien.

Sir, I have my object, in this review, to excite the prejudiced feelings which exist here against England, or against the Protestant Church, within that Kingdom. I have no such prejudices myself. I disdain to be enlisted by prejudices into partnership in regard to historical events. O'Connell was a Catholic; William Smith O'Brien is a Protestant. The race of seats has died away in the agony of a catastrophe which has involved the people of both sects in a common calamity. I have no apology to offer to England as now brought to regard the decay of Ireland as a presage of the decline of the empire.

But it is due to an occasion like this that the truth of history should be spoken, and that Ireland should have her vindication. From me, at least, that debt has been paid. The policy of England was the policy of the age, the times and of her system of government; and that is her only apology.

The sympathy of the American people in behalf of Ireland is thus proved to be just. I proceed to remark, that that sympathy derives intenseness from the conceded genius and proverbial virtues of the Irish people. The plains of Waterloo and the Heights of Abraham bear witness that they are brave and sagacious in war. Like the Greeks, in their decline they have the same heroic qualities in the management of arms. They are confident and generous to a fault; while their whole history and tradition, reaching now a period of over a thousand years; exhibits not one instance of aggressive ambition. Is not, then, the tribute proposed by this resolution due to such a people?—And if so, why shall it not be offered? I un-

answered that it is a question for the British Government—that it is Great Britain and not the British people that exercise clemency or pardon these Irish exiles. But men and nations are moved by passion; and what is asked here is not the exercise of clemency, but persuasive to be addressed to a power that can exercise it.

I am told that we may lawfully sympathize as individuals, in the misfortunes of these unhappy men and their more unhappy country, but that to us, as a political body, a State, or nation, such sympathy is forbidden. That is equivalent to saying that you may never carry it into beneficent action. The sympathy of the individual members of this Congress, and the individual citizens of the United States, and the sympathy of the British people, truly felt by the nation, cannot be effectually expressed in the only way in which the national will is ever manifested—that is by the action of the Government. And now, Sir, let me say that, in my judgement, there is but one code of morality for mankind, and that its obligations bind them equally, whether they be individuals, subjects, citizens, States or nations.

But I shall be told that we may not interfere in what is a domestic affair of a foreign Government. It is true that we may not interfere in the affairs of any other Government, even for just or equitable reasons. But this is not the restraint imposed by the law of nations. The law of nations, while it declares that any government has the absolute right to deal with its own citizens according to its own laws, independently of any other yet affords a large scope for the exercise of offices of kindness, benevolence, and charity. It is